

only on *Aristolochia pistolochia* — itself a somewhat difficult plant to grow in Britain. *Rumina* larvae will eat *A. clematidis* but then appear to sicken and die. From fifteen half grown larvae collected in the Serrania de Cuenca in central Spain in 1982 I obtained only two pupae. One of these died before the winter but the other emerged in June 1983. It still had not expanded its wings after a full 17 minutes of rapid perambulation around the cage and I then had to leave for the morning surgery for which I was already ten minutes late! On returning three hours later however, the butterfly was flying in the cage with perfectly formed wings.

It is difficult to understand the biological advantages of this characteristic in the two *Zerynthia* species. Rapid continuous movement surely attracts predators at a stage when a butterfly is flightless and at its most vulnerable. Whereas *Z. polyxena* inhabits damp meadows, *Z. rumina* usually occurs on dry rocky hillsides and the two species rarely fly on the same ground. A common environmental advantage therefore seems unlikely. Can anyone suggest a hypothesis for this curious activity?

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FRASS DISPOSAL BY LARVAE OF THE VESTAL: RHODOMETRA SACRARIA L. — Although *Rhodometra sacraria* turned up in so many places during 1983 I was not fortunate enough to take any specimens myself. However, I was given a few eggs and from these I reared a very nice series.

The larvae were kept in plastic boxes, the size of which was increased as the larvae grew. I never observed the larvae to leave their food plant (at first, Knotgrass: *Polygonum aviculare* L.) and yet the frass was always either on the sides or the lid of the box, mainly the latter. One evening I decided to watch the larvae to see if I could discover how this came about and was fascinated to observe that as the frass appeared it did not drop as would be expected but remained attached to the anal claspers. Within seconds the larvae were seen to reach round sideways and somehow take hold of the frass, probably with their thoracic legs rather than with their mandibles, but of this I could not be sure, and with a quick straightening of the body hurl the frass away.

When the caterpillars were nearly fully grown I transferred them on to dock. The droppings became more moist but the same habit persisted and although the paper tissues lining the bottom of the box remained fairly clean the lid soon became very soiled. The reason for this behaviour puzzles me. Is it to dispose of tell-tale droppings from the eyes of predatory creatures, to prevent fouling of the food plant or for some other reason? I should be interested to learn whether this habit has been observed before and if so, whether it is peculiar to The Vestal. — G. E. HIGGS, The Cottage, Willen, Milton Keynes.